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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine friendships of early adolescents in a culturally diverse fifth grade class in an urban elementary school in the southeastern United States. The study described and interpreted the experiences of being a friend and having a friend in a culturally diverse classroom. The approach was grounded in symbolic interactionist theory; executed with ethnographic procedures; and guided by constant comparison analysis. Findings indicated that children's friendships were established through frequently rehearsed low verbal protocols. Children negotiated their friendships through strategic adaptation to the parameters of togetherness, being nice, not fighting, and circumvention. Friends were described inclusively rather than exclusively. Friends were described primarily by gender, and across race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status features. Emergent cultural dissonance related to drugs, transiency, and being a runaway acutely affected children's friendships. A list of 61 references is included. (Author)

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An Ethnography of Children's Friendships in a Fifth-Grade Culturally Diverse Class

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine early adolescent children's friendships in one culturally diverse fifth-grade class in an urban elementary school in the southeastern United States. This study described and interpreted what it is like to be and have a friend in a culturally diverse classroom. The approach was grounded in symbolic-interactionist theory, executed with ethnographic procedures, and guided by constant comparison analysis. Findings included the following: (a) children's friendships were established through frequently rehearsed low verbal protocols, (b) children negotiated their friendships through strategic adaptation to the parameters of togetherness, being nice, not fighting, and circumvention, (c) friends were described inclusively rather than exclusively, primarily by gender, but across race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status features, and (d) emergent cultural dissonance related to drugs, transiency, and being a runaway acutely effected children's friendships.

An Ethnography of Children's Friendships in a Fifth-Grade Culturally Diverse Class

Research shows that children's friendships have immediate influence on children in their own social worlds and enduring significance for their interactional competencies in later life (Asher & Renshaw, 1981; Bigelow, 1977; Corsaro, 1985; Denzin, 1977; Fine, 1987; Hartup, 1983; Piaget, 1932; Sullivan, 1953). Late nineteenth and early twentieth century speculative theories on the effects of social groups on human behavior provided the impetus for sociological and psychological interest in children's friendships. Influential scholars such as Cooley, Freud, Durkheim, and Mead, recognized that "early social experiences--not merely with adults but with other youngsters--is centrally important to ontogenesis in many species" (Hartup, 1983 p. 104). Speculative theories began to crystallize with the emergence in the 1930s of seminal observational, sociometric, and experimentalist peer interaction research (for a summary of the literature, see Renshaw, 1981). Within a decade however the interdisciplinary thrust of the 1930s had dissipated with the emergence of Lewin's (1938)

field-experimentalist approach for identifying the determinants of social interaction.

Since the 1930s a diversity of psychological perspectives on behavioral, social-cognitive, and affective processes has dominated the research on children's friendships. Recent themes in the literature have emphasized ontogenesis in children's expectations and awareness of their friendships (for a summary of the literature, see Hartup, 1983). Bigelow (1977) found that children's friendship expectations occur in three loose stages: an empathetic stage in which understanding, self-disclosure, and shared interests emerges--about the fifth to the seventh grade. Other research showed that children in early adolescence conceive friendship as sharing activities, possessions, and absence of fighting (Berndt, 1981; Youniss, 1980). The research also revealed parallels between children's awareness of friendship and their general cognitive development (Selman, 1980). Sociologists have critiqued this literature for its adherence to individualism (Harre, 1986), abstract conceptions of states of friendship, and emphasis on the endpoints of development (Corsaro,

1988). Corsaro (1988) argued that the psychological literature is lacking perspectives on "what it is like to be or have a friend in children's social worlds, or how developing conceptions of friendship become embedded in peer culture." (p. 880).

Theoretical Framework: Toward Praxis in the Sociology of Childhood Socialization

Sociologists in response to dissatisfaction with the paucity of theoretical perspectives on childhood have begun to remedy the neglect. Ambert (1986) explained the lack of interest in sociological studies of childhood in terms of a twofold sociocultural situation: (1) the premium placed on certain types of knowledge that emphasized macro issues and relegated the study of children to a peripheral concern, and (2) the absence of incentives to specialize in micro issues, such as children's friendships. Denzin (1977) wrote that "there does not exist nor has there ever existed a sociology of childhood" (p. 1). Using a conceptual framework grounded in Mead's (1934) theory of self, Denzin (1977) produced benchmark research on children's language socialization experiences. Sociological interest in childhood socialization

however remains latent. More recently the theoretical neglect of childhood socialization was under attack again. Corsaro (1985) described the state of sociological theory on childhood socialization as "primitive" (p. 879). His ethnographic study of preschool children's play and peer culture was based on a constructivist approach to human development. The freshness in Corsaro's (1985) conceptualization of children's friendships was paralleled in other recent sociological research. Researchers have examined children's friendships using conflict-theoretical and symbolic-interactionist conceptual frameworks in combination with ethnographic field methodology (e.g., Fine, 1987; Grant, 1984; Schofield, 1982; Sleeter & Grant, 1986). The latter hybrid design however is not a new one; it is rooted in Thrasher's (1927) pioneering study of peer and adolescent gangs in Chicago, an early example of the use of symbolic interactionism in combination with participant observation (Renshaw, 1981).

Conceptual Focus: Defining Children's Friendships and Cultural Diversity as Problematic

Children's Friendships

What symbolic meaning do children give to their friendships? Many definitions of children's friendships exist in the literature. Hartup (1983) distinguished the semantic difficulties in using the word peer to denote "equal standing." He discussed that equivalence in chronological age does not mean equivalence in other attributes (e.g., intellectual abilities, social skills, and physical beauty), and (2) that psychologists may have overemphasized these experiences in their theories of socialization. Epstein (1983) described friends as voluntary associates who form a primary group, or clique, and peers as the larger, often involuntary population, or secondary group from which friends are chosen (p. 15). Friends have also been addressed in the literature in terms of: type (e.g., acquaintances, just friends, good friends, best friends, true friends), patterns of selection (e.g., reciprocated or reciprocated choices, equal or unequal statuses), and sociometric indices

(e.g. popularity, friendliness, isolation, rejection) (see Epstein, 1983, pp. 15-16).

The existence of so many definitions has created a lack of central definition in the research on the topic. A critical weakness derives from the failure of researchers to wrestle with distinctions of kind and degree in the overlap of terms (see Epstein, 1983). Multiple definitions have not only been pervasive but have generally tended to quantify children's friendships in terms of various sociometric indices and preconceived psychological constructs. The literature is lacking children's symbolic meanings of their own friendships. Clearly conceptually grounded new approaches are needed on how researchers conduct their studies of children's friendships. The situation needs a definition that views children's friendships as conceptually problematic. An operant rather than a verificant definition has the potential to lead to fresh insights. As Hargreaves (1978) argued tacit knowledge based on experience is rarely made explicit because of the lack of a conceptual language with which to express it. Fine (1981) provided a threefold conceptualization of <u>friendship</u> grounded in symbolic

interactionism as "a staging area for interaction, a cultural institution for the transmission of knowledge, and a crucible for the shaping of selves" (p. 41). This definition derives from the mainstream sociological perspectives of Mead's (1934) theory of self, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical variant, and McCall's (1970) perspectives on friendships as benign cultural institutions. Friendship-as-a-staging area is premised on the view that the presence of friends activates a social context for the performance of actions. Friendship-as-a-cultural-institution is premised on the view that it is imperative for the child "to learn the process by which social meanings are constructed, ways of knowing the expectations of others, and methods of determining their likely actions" (p. 47). Friendship-as-a-shaper-of-the-social-self is premised on the view that friendship provides the nexus in which a development of self and role flexibility can occur.

Cultural Diversity

What is meant by cultural diversity? Definitions of cultural diversity are contingent on the researcher's preferred definition of culture. Scholars

generally speak about culture in terms of its meanings and characteristics. Spradley and McCurdy argued that early attempts to define culture were characterized by exhaustive lists of cultural features. Throughout much of this century, Taylor's (1871) definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 1) remained the authoritative one. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) derived a summary definition of culture from some 160 definitions. They emphasized the intangible, symbolic, and ideational aspects of group life as critical features of culture. Symbolic anthropologists, Spradley and McCurdy (1975) defined culture as the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and to generate behavior" (p. 51). In similar vein Spindler (1982) described cultural knowledge as the knowledge that participants use "to guide their behavior in the various social settings that they find themselves in" (p. 5). Spradley and McCurdy (1975) maintained that "because all definitions are arbitrary, it is not meaningful to ask, which definition of culture is the best one? We must inquire

instead about the purpose and usefulness of any definition" (p. 41). Presented here is an operational definition of culture theoretically consistent with the author's definition of children's friendships. It is rooted in symbolic-interactionist theory that was intended to lead to evidence on how children construct meanings of their friendships in a bellwether case (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), or highly developed instance of a culturally diverse classroom. Culture is defined "as consisting of behavioral products, ideas that emerge through interaction, material objects made by humans, or given meaning by them, and behaviors seen as meaningful by actors and observers" (Fine, 1987, p. 125). This definition makes explicit that cultural knowledge is not the whole of culture, as Sleeter and Grant (1986) argued, but that "it is necessary to observe the social behavior of members of a cultural group in order to identify patterns in their activities and rituals" (p. 9).

What is meant by children's friendships in a culturally diverse context? A mutually enforcing tension exists between the sociological construct of children's friendships and the particular cultural

milieu in which they are given meaning. Defining friendship and cultural diversity as discrete or parallelist concepts is arbitrary and reductionist. Friendship, like culture itself is all encompassing, yet elusive, diffusive and ultimately generative. Creating conceptual tension is relevant to both the symbolic interactionist's interest in meaning as social and the ethnographer's charge to reconceptualize rather than verify existing conceptualizations. As Hargreaves (1978) has argued ethnography in combination with symbolic interactionism can provide "a language for speaking about that which is not normally spoken about" (p. 19).

Relevant Literature

The literature on early adolescent children's friendships in culturally diverse classrooms has developed along separate lines of inquiry. Indicative of this diversity was the early literature on race and schooling, for example, which focused on educational outcomes as opposed to social processes (for a summary of the literature, see Grant, 1981). With the paucity of symbolic-interactionist and ethnographic studies on early adolescent children's friendships in culturally

diverse schools in the southeastern United States, a reductionist view of the literature would be inappropriate. The selected literature is based on recent studies that have conceptualized diversity in terms of the combined effect of two more cultural features. Emergent fresh insights have been cast on early adolescent children's friendships in a racially desegregated middle school in a large northeastern city (Schofield, 1981), a culturally diverse junior high school in a working class neighborhood in a midwestern city (Sleeter and Grant, 1986), the socialization of Black females in desegregated classrooms in a working-class community in a large midwestern city (Grant, 1984), and the world of Little League baseball in the middle-class suburbs of northeastern and midwestern cities (Fine, 1987).

Schofield (1981) examined the complementary and conflicting social identities that developed between Black and White middle school children at a research site designed "to serve as a model of integrated schooling" (p. 9) which came close to meeting "the conditions specified by Allport (1954) as conducive to the development of intergroup attitudes and behavior"

(p. 56). The study confirmed earlier findings regarding the rarity of cross-sex and cross-race early adolescent friendships, and that gender is a stronger grouping criterion than race (Damico, 1974). She concluded that as a consequence of the history of racial separation, "it is perhaps unrealistic to expect Blacks and Whites inside the school will form close and deep mutual relations easily or quickly" (p. 85).

Grant (1984) examined the contribution of Black females face-to-face interactions on classroom social life. She identified extent of contacts, helping relationships, and physical and verbal aggression as key dimensions in Black females relationships with peers. Grant (1984) found that "Black girls had more extensive peer contacts than any other race-gender group" (p.107), and "gave peers academic aid and care" (p. 108). In return, Black females received nearly as much aid and care as they dispensed from diverse race-gender peers. Grant (1984) concluded that despite verbal and physical retaliation to more than half the aggression they encountered, "Black girls had more egalitarian relationships with peers than White girls" (p. 109).

Sleeter and Grant (1986) examined the behavior and cultural knowledge of students--especially that which focuses on the participants themselves as members of diverse social categories. The "rich diversity" (p. 10) in the student body attracted the authors to the school. A combination of conflict-theoretical and anthropological perspectives were used in an ethnographic case study design to examine race, social class, gender, and handicap features of cultural diversity and schooling and equality. Five kinds of children's friendships were discovered: best friends, friends one does things with, friends one does some things with, girl/boyfriends, and non-romantic girl/boyfriends. The first three kinds of friendships were with same sex members. Sleeter and Grant found that "distinctions among these three kinds of friends depended on two factors: the level of trust and intimacy between two individuals, and the number of things one did or the amount of time that one spent with that individual" (p. 27). The remaining two kinds of friendships were cross-sex friendships: girl/boyfriend, and non-romantic friends. "Non-romantic friends typically included members of the

opposite sex that the student had known for a long time and talked to in school, but did not date" (p. 27). The authors found that "several students did not name any friends in one or two of the categories" (p. 27). Interestingly, several students said that they were not yet interested in the opposite sex, so all their friendships were with members of the same sex" (p. 27). Sleeter and Grant argued that school was prosocial and that "one could achieve any kind of social image and reputation by controlling one's own behavior, and no one should be excluded from status, popularity, or friendship on the basis of ascribed characteristics such as race, sex, social class, or handicap" (p. 62).

Fine (1987) examined early adolescent male friendships in the social world of Little League baseball in urban, rural, and suburban middle class communities in the northeast and midwest. His theoretical perspective was symbolic-interactionist in the tradition of Cooley, Blumer, Goffman, and Mead. Fine characterized early adolescent male friendships as involving a preoccupation with task-related activities, talk about sex, and opportunities for aggressive outlet. Fine emphasized the emergence of unique

idiosyncratic friendship subcultures. He argued that each friendship group develops its own culture, derived from past knowledge of members, norms of legitimate interaction, functional needs of the group, status and power considerations, and are formulated by the particular events in which the group participates" (p. 316).

The emergent literature provides a challenge to prevailing perspectives on the symbolic meaning of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status on children's friendships. This challenge derives from the mixed messages in the research findings. On the one hand findings affirm much that has already been discovered about the effects of specific cultural features on children's friendships, but on the other are tantamount to a diffusion of the traditional racial disharmony which was especially acute in the southern United States. Resolving the confusion in the literature has the potential to yield fresh insights on hitherto largely neglected cultural features of children's friendships in the social world of the school.

Research Questions

Three interrelated sets of theoretical and practical questions were posed in the present study: (1) the selected questions from the extant literature on the topic, (2) the basic research question, and (3) the statable and more specific research questions. Asher & Gottman (1981) provided a selection of questions that researchers on children's friendships have asked in the past: How many children are without friends and what possible consequences do peer relationship problems have for later life adjustments? What educational strategies are important in helping children who are isolated in or rejected by their peer group? What conditions foster acceptance and friendships between children of different races or markedly different intellectual ability? The present study posed questions that revealed both the perennial and emerging foci of researchers on children's friendships.

The basic research question was an anthropological one: Why is this _____ (act, person, status, concept) the way it is and not different? (Erickson, 1984, p. 62). The intent was to remain aware of "the

commonsense and taken-for-granted knowledge of the participants, and to suggest analytical concepts by which ways such tacit knowledge can be made available for reflection" (Pollard, 1985, p. xi).

The following statable and more specific research questions were stated at the outset in an attempt to define the terms of the inquiry more specifically and help reveal evidence about children's friendships in one culturally diverse class:

1. What is the dynamic of children's friendships in this fifth-grade culturally diverse class?
2. What are the different kinds of friendships present?
3. Are there friendships in which race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status is a critical attribute?

Ethnographic Context and Data Collection Procedures

The data for this ethnographic study was collected in one fifth-grade culturally diverse class in an urban elementary school in the southeastern United States. Site selection followed criterion sampling (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) in three fifth-grade classrooms in four

schools, across rural, urban, and suburban locations in a southeastern state. The search for a research site was a serendipitous one where good fortune with several gatekeepers and potential sites was the obverse of critical searching across four sites in the fall of 1988. The comparative presence of cultural diversity in features related to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status,and handicap were key selection criteria. The participants were 24 male and female 10-, 11-, 12-, and 13-year-olds in one fifth-grade class. The sample included American-born Black and White children, and immigrant and first-generation Cambodian, Chinese, Columbian, Liberian, Mexican, Iranian, and Iraqi children. The research site referred to as Stanley Hazel Elementary School was built in 1962 to meet the demographic needs of a rapidly growing county. During its early years it served a stable middle class community, but within the last decade the attendance area was changed. This resulted in significant cultural change in the student body. In 1990 the state registered enrollment was 505, 55% male and 44% female. Racial/ethnic distribution was as follows: White 26.4%, Black 33.3%, Indian 0.0%,

Oriental 16.1%, Spanish 21.5%, and Other 2.8%. There was 67% approximately on free or reduced-price lunch programs.

Spindler's (1982) criteria for doing "a good ethnography of schooling" (p. 7) guided data collection. Methodological procedures included participant observation, interviewing, and sociometric techniques. Data collection procedures involved a concerted attempt to capture what Denzin (1978) has described as the triangulated perspective--"the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (p. 297). Figure 1 is a chart of triangulation procedures. This chart is derived from Denzin's (1970) conceptual framework for triangulation procedure. The strength of data collection was not viewed in terms of the primacy of one method over another, but in the meaningful combination of methods "so that fully grounded and verified theories could be generated" (p. 297). Participant observer field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) were collected over half-day observation periods (alternating between morning periods defined as 8:00 A.M. to 12:00 A.M., and afternoons defined as 12:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.),

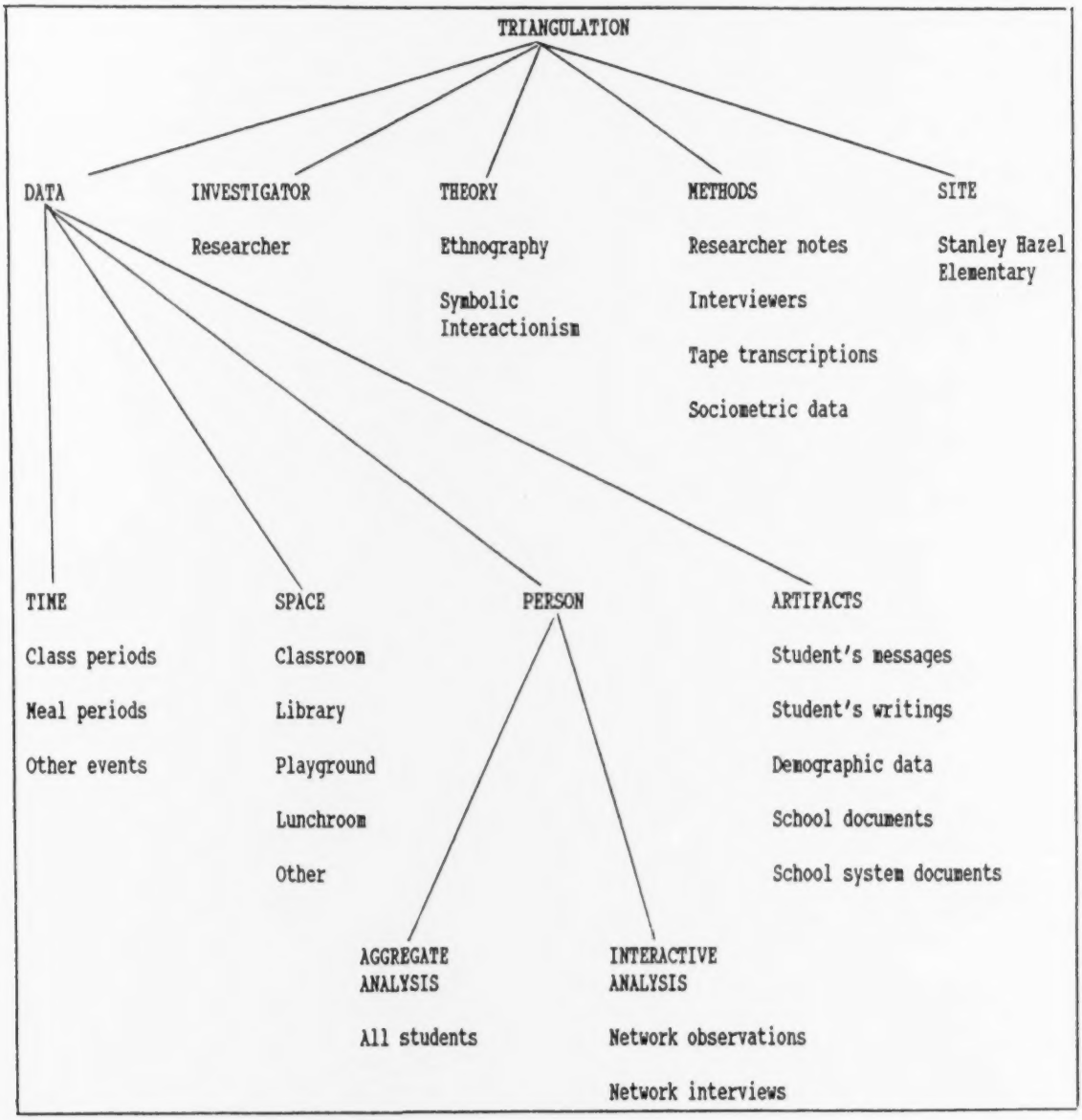


FIGURE 1. Triangulation procedures.

twice-weekly on varied days of the week, between August 1989 and March 1990. Researcher roles varied in intensity along a continuum (Gold, 1958) from participation to observation with the pivotal role of data collector "mediating all other roles played by the investigator" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 102). Denzin's (1970) relativist perspective on participant observer ethics which leaves "the burden of ethical decision on the personal-scientific conscience of the individual investigator" (p. 341) was the premise for ethical obligations to participants. Hammersley's (1983) principles of reflexivity guided the systematic tracking of researcher ethical decision-making. The role of friend was actively cultivated. Fine and Sandstrom (1987) advocated the role of "friend" as an explicitly structural one that is especially appropriate with early adolescents because it allows for flexible research bargaining. Cultivation of the role of friend was guided by Fine and Sandstrom's (1987) advice to avoid judicious criticism and moralistic denouncements in favor of benign listening and minimal intervention in cases of sexual and racist talk. Simmel's (1950) distinction between intimate

form and intimate content guided the demarcation of participant observer and friend in an attempt not to succumb to pretense with the children, on the one hand, or compromise of the researcher role, on the other.

The issue of bias was not viewed as an objective construct, but rather with reference to Erickson's (1984) description of "disciplined subjectivity" (p. 61). In line with Strauss's (1987) advice to "mine your experiences there is gold there" (p. 11) and Peshkin's (1988) exhortation "to tame subjectivity" (p. 20), attempts were made to limit observer biases, while remaining cognizant of the fact that they could not be eliminated. Outset biases were described with reference to LeCompte's (1987) guidelines for identifying bias and subjectivity in the researcher's personal and professional experiences. Salient biases derived from the author's vicarious understanding of cultural diversity in the southern United States, compounded by professional schooling in a culturally homogenous western European society in sharp contrast to the cultural milieu represented in the study. These biases were reflexively derived and shared with mentors prior to entry into the field.

Patton's (1980) informal and interview-guide-approach interviews approaches were used. Informal interviews took place throughout the study and varied from momentary exchanges to brief conversational interludes, often occurring during transition times. Successive rounds of interview-guide-approach interviews, which usually extended 10, 15, or 20 minutes were conducted in October, 1989, January, 1990, and March, 1990. These interviews combined the advantage of "conversation building within a particular subject area, spontaneous question wording, and the establishment of a conversational style, with the focus on a particular subject that had been predetermined (Patton, 1980, p. 200). Interview topics were derived from focus topics grounded in the emerging theory (e.g. fights, children without friends, children with friendship making difficulties, new friends, seating friends). Strategies for minimizing unease and reciprocation for data included joking about the size of the microcassette, playing tapes at varied speeds and pitches, and the promise that the interviewees could hear their own voices later. Interviews took place in a library storeroom with both interviewer and

interviewee seated at the child's level at a small library table. All interviews were audiorecorded using a voice-activated microcassette recorder, and later transcribed.

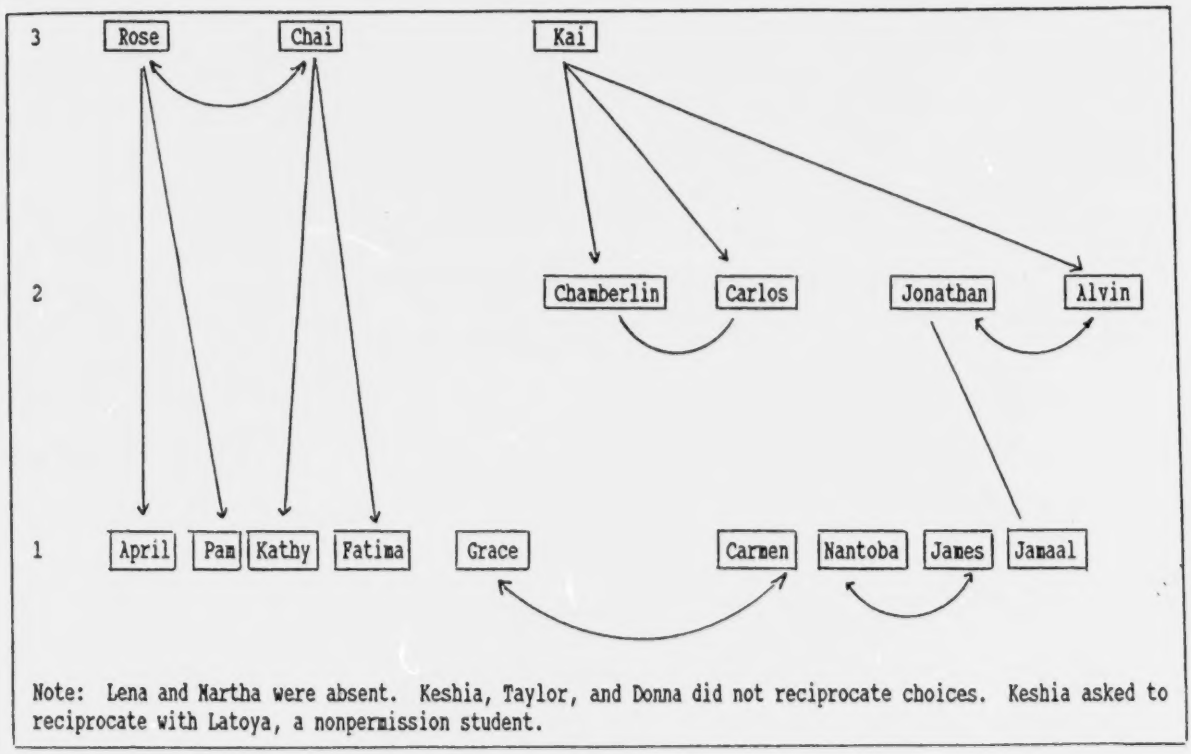
Hallinan's (1981) roster technique was used in conjunction with McCandless and Marshall's (1957) picture-sociometric technique. This hybrid technique has proven to yield reliable and valid data with preschoolers with limited reading skills (see Pellegrini, 1987). The technique was adopted for the following reasons: (1) the poor reading skills of the children, generally, (2) the enrollment flux with the attendant difficulty for children to keep abreast of newly arrived children's names, especially those of immigrant children, and (3) the language difficulties of immigrant children in understanding verbal protocols. Color 3-inch by 5-inch children's photographs were randomly ordered in rows of 6-across ad 4-down on a 3-foot square white mat-cardboard. Children's names were printed underneath the photographs with black-felt pen. Children were asked to respond on a questionnaire to other children in their class in terms of Best Friend, Friend, and Don't

Know. Administration of the tests was conducted in October, 1989 and January, 1990. Tests were administered following the first two rounds of individual interviews with the children in October, 1989, and January, 1990. Sociograms were constructed to assist with conceptual clarity. Figure 2 is an example of a sociogram based on roster and picture-sociometric data constructed during data collection.

Physical-trace artifacts were collected. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984), physical-trace collection methods involve the location, identification, analysis, and evaluation of "the erosion and accretion of nonsymbolic and natural objects used by people" (p. 154). Children's message notes, self-memos, and doodling were examples of artifacts that were collected during the study. Also collected were PTA calendars, school system documents, and copies of weekly demographic reports.

Glaser and Strauss's (1967, 1987) constant comparison method and procedures for carrying out effective and efficient theoretically informed interpretations of materials guided data analysis. Collection of data involved searching for key and

Sociogram Based on Test 1 Best Friend Choices



Note: Lena and Martha were absent. Keshia, Taylor, and Donna did not reciprocate choices. Keshia asked to reciprocate with Latoya, a nonpermission student.

FIGURE 2. Example of a sociogram constructed during data collection.

recurrent events and activities which became categories of focus for further observation and interviewing (e.g., early categories included making friends, expressing friendship, best friends, gender demarcation). Incidents of the categories were collected to see the diversity of dimensions under the category (e.g., children's negotiation of their friendships included togetherness which included dimensions of sharing, being nice, and not fighting). The data was continually worked for an emerging model to discover basic social processes. Writing occurred as the analysis focused on emergent themes.

Findings and Discussion

Running through the findings that emerged were the pervasive themes of diffusion and generation in the children's friendships. A dynamic pattern of change rather than constancy emerged in the establishment, negotiation, kind, and dissonance in the children's friendships. These findings are presented and discussed here.

Establishment

Children-created encounters

Children-created encounters with newly arrived

students were critical for the establishment of friendships. Children-created encounters were simple low verbal protocols. The flux in class enrollment ensured frequent rehearsals of these ritualistic protocols. Features of the ritual were: the approach, the exchange of names, cursory small-talk, and the invitation to play. The existence of the in vivo code "went up to them" was repeated frequently in the children's interviews. The children highlighted the salience of the exchange of names and the inconsequential nature of the rest of the interaction. Jonathan, a Black American male said: "Just ask them what's their name and stuff, and get to know them." (Interview Transcription-10/89). Difficulties with potentially confusing cultural cues or previous experiences were not observed. Rather cultural accommodation with respect to language, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status features characterized the children's prosocial encounters. Alvin, a Black American male who shared a best friend relationship with Kai, a first-generation Cambodian-born male explained: "They just tell them their names ... and if they like you ... they'll be your friend

(Interview Transcription-10/89). The children's prosocial behavior was generally the obverse of a commonsense response to the cultural exigencies of their situation. This finding shows parallels with the Opies (1959) and Davies (1984) who argued that reciprocity was a critical construct embedded in children's ritualized behavior, but contrasts with their finding that children's initial encounters are characterized by highly verbal protocols.

Negotiation

Negotiation was another a recurring theme in the children's friendships. This took place through strategic adaptation to the parameters of togetherness, being nice, fights, and circumvention. Pollard (1985) referred to the parameters of children's actions as the extremes of their strategies. Listed parameters were researcher constructed categories grounded in field notes and interview transcriptions. Children's adaptations to parameters were idiosyncratic and expressed in contrastive terms. Togetherness was contrasted with not being together, being nice with not being nice, and fighting with not fighting.

Togetherness was a simple reality that implied being present for a same-gender friend but cut across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic features in the social lives of the children. James, a Black American male explained: They just sit there and talk awhile." (Interview Transcript-10/89). Sharing as indicated in James's comment was an important dimension in togetherness. It varied from sharing conversation, time, play, and or material things. It often manifested itself in the sharing of a single dimension, but could involve an interactive dimension e.g., sharing material things for play. Sharing per se rather than its specific manifestations was critical. Carmen, a Mexican-American female explained that absence of togetherness was a sign of not negotiating friendships: "Well we got into a fight. And I never knew where she was." (Interview Transcription-10/89). Being nice emerged repeatedly as a response to the perennial question: What is a friend? Niceness was conceptualized in terms of expressive dimensions. Niceness was equated with sharing and respect among children, and these concepts were threads in the diffusive theme of reciprocity in the children's social

relationships. Chai, a Chinese-born female explained how she expressed friendship as: "I guess try and be nice and show them respect." (Interview Transcription-10/89). In response to the question What is being nice? Rose, a White American female replied: "Nice is that you give your friend somethin'. You give it right back to her. You share things." (Interview Transcription-1/90). Rose's comments were typical of those of several other children across race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status who subsumed the concept of sharing within their view of being nice. "Not fighting" emerged repeatedly as an example of the children's explicitness on how friends should act with their friends. Although fights became part of the children's lore, the aftereffects of fights were short lived affairs. James explained: "After two days, they be friends again." (Interview Transcription-1/90). Fights between friends occurred infrequently, and the children's popular perception of fighting was that only nonfriends fought. In contrast to many of the teachers who viewed fighting as deviant, some children's interview transcriptions indicated that they viewed fights as having a salutary affect on their

friendships. These children viewed fights as requisite hurdles that needed to be overcome in order for the friendship process to develop. In reference to a series of aggressive encounters with Donna, a Black American female, which had culminated in a physical outburst, Rose, a White American female stated: "Then the next day, she started talkin', and then we just be friends." (Interview Transcription-1/90). Both the Opies (1959) and Davies (1984) investigated the breaking of friendships. Although the Opies maintained that "children make and break friendships with a rapidity disconcerting to the adult spectator" (p. 324), Davies advanced the view that "children's friendships are in fact surprisingly stable. What appears to be breakages, are, rather, manoeuvres within the friendship so that the functions friendships serve can be fulfilled" (p. 268). Findings in the present study overlap with those of Davies. Several adult spectators expressed their concerns about the physically injurious effects of fighting. In contrast the children did not share their concerns. Whereas the teachers were interested in a policy of containment, the children were interested in the expressive

dimensions of fighting. Observations and interview transcriptions indicated that children viewed fighting as an adaptive strategy which was not always an extreme one in their friendships.

Children proved adept at circumventing the imposed school contexts that limited their opportunities to interact with each other. Circumventions included such practices as dawdling and planned opportunities for social interaction. These circumventions involved capturing time and space in which to interact with friends. April, a Black American female explained how she created opportunities for social release with friends during P.E.: "We walks around. Well, we have to run to P.E. We walks, so we be talkin'." (Interview Transcription-1/90).

Kind

Best friends, and friends emerged as dominant kinds of friends in the children's social lives. Best friend and friend descriptions derived from the sociometric tests and interview-guide-approach interviews in October, 1989. The salience of togetherness emerged here as in the children's discussions of friendships generally in their lives.

Chamberlin, a Black American male explained: "A best friend you can play with him all the time, and with somebody you don't know, that's not your best friend, you don't want to play with him." (Interview Transcription-10/89). Fatima, an African American female described her best friend as: "She is fun to be around." (Interview Transcription-10/89).

Sociometric findings showed that the children broke the imposed idea of nominating a single best friend in favor of many friends. All nominations were within-gender, but across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status lines. Chai, a Chinese born female showed the unwillingness that was typical of several children to nominate a single best friend. She stated: "Shysta (a Black American female) is one, and Kathy (an Iranian-American female) is another." (Interview Transcription-10/89). Nantoba, a Black American male blurred the distinction between friends and best friends. He stated: "Like I had lots of best friends. Like I had a best friend last year. His name was Jasper." (Interview Transcription-10/89).

Hallinan's (1981) roster technique allowed for "the respondent to decide how many responses to put in

each category" (p. 101). This materialized in the present study where children indicated a pattern of inclusiveness about friends and favored multiple best-friend nominations as opposed to the more generic friend nomination. This finding affirms earlier ones that have indicated that preadolescents typically nominate many children as friends (Fine, 1981; Sleeter & Grant, 1986). It breaks with Fine's finding however in terms of the overwhelming number of best-friend nominations reciprocated. In the present study 91% of all possible relationships were best-friend nominations as opposed to Fine's (1981) 18% of all possible relationships were described as close ones. These sociometric findings taken in isolation might suggest that the children were unable to dimensionalize along a friendships continuum, but when triangulated with the children's repeated incidents of prosocial behavior provide further evidence of the children's inclusive rather than exclusive friendship patterns. In contrast to Sleeter and Grant's (1986) findings on the existence of girl/boyfriend and nonromantic girl/boyfriends, the present study showed only emergent interest toward the end of the study in the friendship patterns of two

children. Absence of these kinds of friendships is consistent with the distinctive pattern of gender cleavage which was evidenced across race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Rosenberg (1975) referred to the situation of being a member of a minority in a classroom on the basis of a trait that is disvalued by the majority as contextual dissonance. He stressed that the negative consequences of minority status within the immediate context derive from the fact that social comparison processes operate more forcefully at the face-to-face level rather than when society at large is the frame of reference. Two striking kinds of dissonance emerged in the present study. First, there was immigrant dissonance that derived from being an immigrant. Second, there was individual dissonance that derived from the pronounced disjunction that certain children experienced between the realities of their home and school social worlds.

Immigrant children experienced popular misconceptions about their culture but generally endured them with forbearance. Incidents of dissonance included derogatory comments on the status of their

health, difficulties with language, name calling, and physical appearance. On popular fears about immigrants as carriers of disease, Rose, a White American female stated: "Sometimes they don't want that person to get near them, cause they speak like they have rabies, or somethin'" (Interview Transcription-1/90). There was general agreement among both immigrants and nonimmigrant children that children from other countries experienced difficulty in making friends. Language was the most frequently observed and cited difficulty. Keshia, a Black American female explained: "It's hard for them to get a friend without speakin' their language" (Interview Transcription-1/90). Although language difficulties were readily acknowledged, both immigrant and nonimmigrant children were slow to admit that children from other countries were often the butt of name-calling and insults. Derogatory names that were overheard or described in interview transcriptions included: "Jalapeno" (Field Notes-10/26), "Cambodian fool," "Jungle people," and "Chink" (Interview Transcriptions-1/90). "Jalapeno" was the only racist comment that the author heard, all other examples of racist innuendo derived from

interview probes to children to tell the author about the names that students use to give children from other countries a hard time. The single most penetrating abuse was directed toward Kai, the Cambodian-born male. Kai's sociometric nominations indicated his popularity in the class. Alvin, his Black American friend indicated that Kai's physical appearance had proven the butt of racist comments. Alvin explained: "They don't like his face shape and stuff" (Interview Transcript-1/90). Racial and ethnic misclassification was also evidenced. Jonathan, a Black American male who had earlier indicated his intolerance of Spanish-speaking students: "Cause they be talkin' how they bring brothers to America, or somethin like that ... like Spanish people" misclassified a Anusch, a newly arrived Iranian boy as: "This Spanish boy Anusch, he's nice, but he be talkin' too much" (Interview Transcription-1/90). In a group interview in March, 1990 Jonathan, Alvin, Chamberlin, and Jamaal, all Black American males became side-tracked in a discussion as to whether Anusch, the newly arrived Iranian male could speak Spanish, and who had heard him doing so. Other incidents of this kind revealed that the children held

broad conceptual categorizations of immigrants as Hispanic, Oriental, or African. It also revealed that the children were unable, not only to distinguish between ethnic groups, but that they conveniently and arbitrarily ascribed cultural status to newly arrived immigrant children. Anusch's swarthy appearance and broken English provided the false premise for their views that he must belong to the Spanish-speaking cultural group in the class.

Although several children exhibited traits or characteristics that were disvalued by the majority of children in the study, the experiences of Jonathan, Lena, and Donna, were the most intense. All three children lacked the redeeming features necessary to avoid a culturally dissonant position in the class. At the root of the problem was a disjunction between the realities of their school and home social worlds.

Jonathan, a 12-year-old Black American male was the most affected by the disjunction between his home and school situations. He lived with his mother, a single-parent and crack-cocaine addict; his teenage sister; and her infant child. Jonathan often responded to situations in ways that made his friends wary of

him. He tested the parameters of fighting. Nantoba, a Black American male friend who protected Jonathan from himself during violent outbursts stated that he often had "to hold Jonathan back" (Interview Transcription-1/90). Jonathan's theft of a bicycle, unexplained facial cuts and bruises, and chronic absenteeism resulted in suspicion about his activities, fear of what he might do when provoked, constant catching up with his schoolwork, and reassigned seating. In a classroom where togetherness, being nice, and sharing were highly valued parameters of friendship, Jonathan quickly became estranged from his friends.

Lena, a 13-year-old Black American female was the oldest participant in the study. She appeared physically more mature than her classmates. Lena lived with her single-parent mother, but occasionally stayed with her sister during times of domestic stress in another part of the city. The precariousness of her situation was revealed in the dramatic change of her sociometric status from the first to the second round of tests. Initially nominated as one of the most popular children in the class her stature decreased to one of the least popular. The author described Lena as

"an intermittent runaway" (Field Notes-2/90). During her absences rumors were rife that she was pregnant and unable to return to school. Nantoba, a Black American male stated: "Everyone say she's overweighted and she's pregnant" (Interview Transcription-1/90). Whatever about the hurt generally caused by these reports, the gossip was significant to push the parameters of Lena's best friendship with Frances, another Black American female, to a breakdown. Field Notes (2/90) revealed that Lena fuelled gossip with her frequent stories of purported pregnancies and denials of same in her Housing Project apartment. In March, 1990 Lena disappeared and her whereabouts could not be established. Her mother filed a missing persons report. At the conclusion of the study she had been missing for 4 weeks.

Lena's friendships were affected by her absences from school. To her credit, her classmates viewed her as having positive qualities as evidenced by her first sociometric rating. Like Jonathan, however, she was not often with them. Days and weeks passed by and distance between Lena and her friends became critical. As the subject of ridicule, she lost friends in a class

where being together was critical and being ridiculed was sufficient to breach the parameters of children's friendships.

Donna, a Black American female was described by the author as "her own worst enemy" (Field Notes-11/89). She was the daughter of transient parents who lived in a nearby motel. Donna arrived in class in late October, 1989. She was not receptive to new friends. She sat in a single desk behind the radiator which had been placed there out of the way rather than as an appropriate seating location. Donna expressed suspicion about making friends: "If they wouldn't make friends with me, I wouldn't make friends with them" (Interview Transcription-10/89). In every potentially prosocial situation her response was not prosocial. In reference to a fight that she had experienced she stated: "Sometimes they accuse me of do'in somethin' and I don't do it" (Interview Transcription-10/89). She was the only student who qualified her response on the healing that follows fights by stating that only "sometimes" (Interview Transcription-1/90) people come together after fights. On her relationships with immigrant children, she was equally hostile. She

stated: "I don't really know what they think, or anythin'. Cause they hardly ever hang around me" (Interview-Transcription-1/90). In late January, 1990, she left Stanley Hazel Elementary School. In a classroom where the majority of children actively promoted friendships, Donna was the antithesis of what friendship was all about. In an ironic twist on the student's view of the parameter of togetherness in the negotiation of their friendships, Donna's response was perhaps due in part to her efforts to insulate herself from the prevailing prosocial environment in order to deal with the next change of address in her life.

It was not only that Jonathan, Lena, and Donna did not satisfactorily negotiate the parameters of their friendships, but that they had special impediments in doing so. Unlike other children who routinely stretched the parameters of their friendships, these children subverted the tacitly agreed parameters of friendships and social relationships through maladaptive responses. Their responses were influenced by overwhelming cultural dissonance in their home social worlds which carried over into the school context.

Implications and Conclusions: The Problematic and Generative Nature of Children's Friendships in Culturally Diverse Contexts

This study affirms many earlier findings on children's friendships, but subsumes and elaborates others. Conclusions must be tentative in view of the fact that this study was contextually bound in time and space. The study focused on a bellwether instance of early adolescent children's friendships in one culturally diverse school. The increasing diversity in the urban southeastern United States clearly compels the need for sustained study of this dynamic if the literature is to reflect what is happening in elementary schools. The cultural balances in the present study were site- and person-specific. They do not purport to represent this context, or any other, in another time or place. The cultural balance is one that favored American-born Black males and females. It included a limited number of other cultural groups which tended to give the sample variety but lacked intensity with respect to the specific strength-in-depth of any one immigrant or emergent cultural group. It is arguable as to the extent that such is possible

in view of the significant demographic flux in the school, district, and county. Lacking also is a greater balance in the indigenous White representation, most especially with regard to males. The issue becomes not so much finding balances but in investigating imbalances across cultural contexts toward comparability of findings. Studies directed at investigating different imbalances in race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, handicap, and community demographic features are necessary to provide comparative data on the social world of children.

The study revealed that certain children experienced their friendships as phenomena that existed exclusively outside the confines of their classrooms and schools. For these children the thrust of the questions posed in this study were exigent ones which lacked congruity with the meaning of friendship in the children's social lives. Studies directed at investigating children's friendships networks "conceived as sets of relationships which people imbue for personal and collective purposes' (Fine & Kleinman, 1983, p. 97) could generate more holistic perspectives on the nexus of children's home, school, and other

social worlds.

Children's friendships are affected by others outside the stratum of what Glassner (1976) described as "kids society." Parents, teachers, and others have significant potential to influence children. Although this study has its own merit in focusing on children's meanings of friendships in their own social world in school, studies of other contexts where children's friendships are challenged is needed. Studies directed at investigating potential values clashes between adults and children, for example, could generate insights on the tensions and pressures that children experience in negotiating what Simmel (1950) described as that unique point at which a particular combination of social circles intersects and varies from person to person.

Arguably the most significant finding in this study relates to the reality of school as a dissonant force in the lives of some children. The effects of various types of dissonance has been well documented (see Rosenberg, 1975), but this study is significant in highlighting the effect of emergent dissonance features on children's friendships. Immigrant children

experienced dissonance related to their language, dress, and physical appearance, but this was not as acute as dissonances related to the emergent cultural features of drugs, transiency, and being a runaway. Herein lies the unexhausted implication of this study. There is much optimism revealed for the development of early adolescent children's friendships in culturally diverse elementary schools. Data repeatedly triangulated to indicate that children were prosocial and culturally accommodating in their friendships. Emergent cultural features however do not augur as well for the future. The findings in the present study provide inconclusive evidence on a concentration of dissonance among lower socioeconomic status Black males and females. Further study is required to determine the degree to which aggregate analyzes of our fellow human beings in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status continue to lead to the most useful information on diversity in elementary schools. In this connection, Goodenough (1987) has cautioned that, whereas aggregate analyzes help account for the stereoptyping processes in culture, they "should not lure us into the false expedient of forgetting to look

for individual and small group differences" (p.96). The situation challenges researchers on children's friendships in culturally diverse contexts to exercise their sociological imaginations (Mill, 1959) toward a critique of existing theoretical foci and potential alternatives. If researchers are to conduct further meaningful research, they must examine emergent issues with reference to extant findings. The question becomes: What is the dynamic between accepted and emergent cultural influences on children's friendships? This study provides a basis for a reconceptualization of children's friendships in culturally diverse contexts by making clear that children's friendships are not only influenced by cultural features related to race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, but also by emergent individual cultural dissonances related to drugs, transiency, and being a runaway.

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